

Reconciliation Report

Meeting Jesus in the 'Hood

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*Researching, Teaching,
Mobilizing, for the Name—
Serving Primarily the Afri-
can American Church*

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WebWatch:

- Intercristo provides leads for those pursuing Christian ministry: www.jobleads.org
- Barna Research provides free bi-weekly research reports via email—and read latest research: <http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/Home.asp>

Correction: 34.3 million die without Christ annually, not daily, as reported last month.

Aubrey, Doug, and I attempted to penetrate the world of some men talking on both sides of a low pipe railing on the front porch of a project apartment. Sometimes we walk up saying, “We’re not Jehovah-Witnesses,” to break the ice, but these men probably knew who we were. Small talk past, we asked “Bump,” the sole remainder among rapidly dwindling cohorts (who leave with “I’m straight”), if he was absolutely positive that he was going to heaven when he died. No, not really—his answers were strong on working his way in. But he stayed to listen. Frequently we hear a variant of, “No disrespect, but I’ve got this [can of beer in a brown bag] in my hand and I don’t talk about God like this.” We might offer to empty the contents, gratis, but no takers to date. We assure that God would prefer they listen with beer, rather than not to listen with beer, but it’s an easy excuse. Others, getting increasingly uncomfortable with the Gospel, might succeed in flagging down a Brother and dart into a car—with or without an excuse. But Bump stayed.

We showed him that even if somehow he never sinned again and lived to old age, he still couldn’t get into heaven on his record. He still had previous sins for which to pay, and it only takes one. We spoke of Jesus who had no sin and who became our substitute sacrifice, paying the penalty for our sin debt so that we could be free to go to heaven. No one of us led him to Jesus--it was common cause. He was serious enough to pray right there on the porch to receive Christ’s free gift of salvation by faith alone. We gave him a Bible and followup materials.



Julius Mwanguzi (from Uganda), Doug Dalrymple and Aubrey Fritz (from left) in front of Bump’s

Bump wanted someone to stick with him to help him be a Christian. What? Almost nobody has this concern initially. I agreed to pick him up the next two Monday nights to take him to the House of Refuge, where I was teaching money stewardship. Afterwards we again went over the basis of salvation at

our home, since this offer teeters upon being the proverbial “If it sounds too good to be true. . .” The next Monday Bump was again there for the last of the financial series. Amazing. He just needed to change clothes to jump into the car. After talking with the mostly homeless men at the House, we again came home to discuss walking the Way. His family and the homeboys thought he was not for real.

Bump kept asking us to visit his mother and blind father, so we arranged a visit when my pastor, Joe Novenson and a summer intern, together with Aubrey, came along. Here was evangelism through a family network! Helping the blind to see. But Bump’s dad was walking in blazing light. When we left, we felt as though we were in Shadowland. His head habitually rolled in an arc from his right, over his ample, pajamaed chest, as he almost whispered about the high, wide and deep love of God. Sensing our interview concluded, nobody prayed but Bump’s Dad—despite the fact that you’ve probably never heard prayers like Pastor Joe prays. I’d considered tossing in a closing word, but Joe said it would have been like, “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2, NIV). We took down *his* phone number to call in spiritual warfare. We almost tiptoed away from that big-hearted man, realizing why Bump was dangling ripe fruit when we met. And why he was determined to get help to grow. We just connected the spiritual dots. Rarely do we connect with Providence’s aura so plain.

Aubrey, a passionate discipler, took over followup. I tried to get Bump hired at Crystal Hamburgers. He repaired bicycles on the front porch, then he found a job out of town, and moved out of his sister’s apartment. Aubrey is trying to track him down through his father.

Since 1990 we’ve been visiting almost every week when in town—in the early years far more often. A few resident friends are still around since 1990 in this transient neighborhood. We ask God for divine appointments, then show up. Recently God has burdened some friends to come along more regularly--Pastor Joe for some months, some church interns, Flo Samuels (who went to Uganda last year), Aubrey Fritz, scheduled for his first Uganda mission, and Doug Dalrymple, who recently became a Board member. We take Ugandans to the streets when they visit—quite a ministry surprise to most. Flo, who has seen a whole houseful of women profess Christ, has a weekly Bible study with those ladies.

Sometimes you do things because you can’t not do them. What is always a challenge to begin, almost always is a joy in retrospect. This place of hip hop, rap undulating from low cars, sweet smoke, lookouts on the corners, invisible transfers to cars stopped on the street--where the young women passing are hit on almost from a sense of duty and money is thrown inexplicably from pile to pile with the toss of dice—this place of crack action, drive-by panic, electric ambiance and Muslims running the corner store—is also a place of blessing and of saints of God. God is saving some everywhere.

Prayer and Praise Points:



↑ Judi and I greatly relaxed visiting Susanna in Tennessee, Ethan in Texas and campsites in western North Carolina.

↑ The Urban Ministers Network is in the process of passing leadership to a younger generation. Please pray that God will bless the transition and use it to bring Himself honor.

↑ Pray for the Board members of God’s

choice. Two are considering this and another graciously accepted.

↑ For Divine appointments and good followup of those professing Christ on the streets.

↑ Wisdom to develop excellent PowerPoint presentations—one to promote world missions in Black churches.

↑ Hattie Riley’s hus-

band’s health is improving. Please pray that she might be able to return to Uganda.

↑ Susanna and Ethan need access to certain Fall semester classes, and Tim needs wisdom as he considers options.

↑ That we will be fully prepared to teach and serve in various ways in Uganda, and for wisdom in Team prep.

Interested in serving some inner city children?

Judi and I greatly enjoy the friendship of DeVonte, Carmella and Vanessa. Great kids. The Lord provided the way for them to attend Cedine Bible Camp for a week this summer. Maybe God is leading you to find some kids in a project in your city that would bless you and your family. Here are some ways to locate them:

1. Check with the local Child Evangelism Fellowship for kids that professed Christ from the inner city, then arrange to visit the mother and meet the family.
 2. Ask your pastor who an evangelical Black pastor friend is, then contact that pastor to locate the mother of "fatherless" kids in his church who you could help parent.
 3. Visit a local recreation center director, tell him what you'd like to do, that you are Christians, and that you'd like to talk with the mother of some kids that need some parental role models.
 4. Just go door-to-door with the Gospel, and you'll probably find them rather soon.
- We'd be happy to provide suggestions along the way if you contact us. If you're in Chattanooga, we can suggest some names.



DeVonte, Carmella and Vanessa (front)

For urban evangelism training and followup materials, click on the left hand bar at www.RMNI.org/evangelism.htm



Our webmaster, Walt Robertson, can post anything to the web except a live trout. Dead ones he can handle. This includes this newsletter, an entire book with detailed charts and diagrams, spreadsheets, graphics, etc. A bulletin board is coming soon. He does all this work gratis, while working fulltime for the Salvation Army. Recently the International Association of Web Masters & Designers evaluated our site and awarded us the Golden Web award for 2001-2002. A site must get at least 24 of 30 points possible. Congratulations, Walt, and thanks for all you do! If you need website development, check with him at www.MyJC.net

Question: Please email or send a note if you would rather that we produce this Report every other month, rather than monthly, or would appreciate instead a quarterly Report. Any other comments upon the format and length, etc. would be valued.



Pilot son Ethan and Judi Sutherland preparing to fly in this Cessna 172 (left). Looks worried, doesn't he? Thanks for prayers for him. We circle Gregg Co. airport, where LeTourneau's fleet is stationed.

